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Chairman: Mr. Olhaye ..... (Djibouti)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 100: Environment and sustainable development (A/54/25 and Add.1, A/54/80, A/54/98, A/54/212; A/C.2/54/5)

(c) Convention on Biological Diversity (A/54/428)

(d) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind

(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/54/96)

(f) Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/C.2/54/4)

1. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa), speaking on agenda item 100(e), reviewed the main new developments relating to implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification. At the second session of the Conference of the Parties held in Dakar (Senegal) from 30 November to 11 December 1998, important decisions had been taken on communications procedures and consideration of the implementation of the Convention. Decisions had also been taken regarding the budget and programme of the Convention secretariat for 1999, the operation of the Global Mechanism and cooperation with the other conventions dealing with sustainable development. It was also worth noting that important events had been organized in parallel with the Conference, including the first international round table of parliamentarians on the subject of desertification, which had led to the adoption of a declaration.

2. While activities to implement the Convention continued a considerable number of countries had acceded to or ratified the Convention. The tally, to date, was 159 ratifications and accessions. Countries which had not yet ratified the instrument were invited to take the requisite steps to do so.

3. Seizing the opportunity offered by the first session of the General Assembly following the establishment in Bonn of the permanent secretariat of the Convention, he once again expressed his gratitude to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany for its assistance and to the German people for its warm welcome and hospitality.

4. In anticipation of the third session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held from 15 to 26 November 1999 in Recife, Brazil, the secretariat had facilitated the holding of a number of regional dialogues which had enabled developing countries affected by desertification to take stock of the process of implementation of the Convention and, if need be, to establish guidelines and to harmonize their positions. He wished to emphasize that the African countries were very well prepared: 41 national reports had been sent in to the Convention secretariat, which would be submitting them to the Conference. That number — which had rarely been equalled in a multilateral process of that nature — was evidence of the importance countries attached to the Convention. He was certain that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the countries of the Asian region would produce just as many national reports when it came to organizing the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties.

5. A headquarters agreement had recently been signed between the Brazilian Government and the Convention secretariat. In that connection, he wished to acknowledge the spirit of cooperation shown by the Brazilian Government. No effort had been spared to ensure that preparations for the third session of the Conference of the Parties proceeded smoothly.

6. The attention of delegations was drawn to the decision referred to in section IV of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/96), which called on the General Assembly to decide to finance from the regular programme budget of the United Nations the conference-servicing costs arising from sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies. That proposal was modelled on the arrangement made with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The General Assembly was therefore requested to include in the budget and calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 2000-2001 the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies, as it had done for the biennium 1998-1999.

7. **Mr. Zedan** (Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity) recalled that the Conference of the Parties to the Convention had been unable, as yet, to conclude the negotiations on a biosafety protocol; it had therefore decided to suspend its first extraordinary meeting to enable the Parties and Governments to hold informal consultations on the outstanding issues. At those consultations progress had been made on several key points, in particular regarding the scope of the protocol, how commodities should be dealt with under the protocol and the relationship between the protocol and the existing corpus of international law. The extraordinary meeting was to be

resumed from 24 to 28 January 2000 in Montreal and would be preceded by consultations beginning on 20 January 2000. The successful conclusion of those negotiations would represent important progress towards achieving sustainable development because the protocol in question represented a critical attempt to address environmental and developmental concerns regarding a new technology.

8. The Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice had held its fourth meeting in June 1999, in Montreal. It had made seven recommendations to the Conference of the Parties. One of them, which had already had considerable impact, dealt with genetic use restriction technologies. The Subsidiary Body had concluded that further research and study was required in order adequately to understand the impact of the new technologies on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. It had also recommended that the Parties should not approve such technologies for field testing until scientific data was available that could justify such testing, and that they should not approve their commercial use until adequate scientific assessments had been carried out. The Subsidiary Body had also requested the Executive Secretary to prepare for the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties a detailed proposal to address the issues of peer review and scientific assessments for the Convention, drawing on the lessons learned from implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

9. During the inter-sessional meeting on the operations of the Convention, the participants had drawn up a recommendation containing elements of a decision on rationalizing the conduct of meetings of the Conference of the Parties, a strategic plan for the Convention and ways of improving the operation of the Subsidiary Body. The participants had also considered issues relating to access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing and the relationship between intellectual property rights and relevant provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. The Panel of Experts on Access and Benefit-Sharing had met in Costa Rica at the beginning of October and had adopted a series of agreed conclusions on a variety of issues.

10. Cooperation with other processes was an issue of crucial concern to the General Assembly and the parties to the Convention. In that context, the Conference of the Parties had adopted a joint work plan for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfront Habitat. The report in document A/54/428 gave other examples of cooperation. At its next meeting, the Conference would consider its fifth thematically focused programme of work, which dealt with the biological diversity of dryland ecosystems. At its fourth meeting, the Subsidiary Body had requested the Executive Secretary to prepare for its fifth meeting, in consultation with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, a draft programme of work for the biome. The results of that consultation would provide a basis on which to explore the modalities of real cooperation with respect to the implementation of the two conventions. The Subsidiary Body would take up that programme of work at its fifth meeting, in early 2000. After that, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8 (j) of the Convention would meet for the first time in Seville (Spain) in February. The results of its work would be particularly important in the light of the recommendation adopted by the Subsidiary Body, which called for consideration of the interests of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles to be included in the consideration of each of the topics in its programme of work.

11. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that those States reaffirmed their commitment to the achievement of sustainable development and the implementation of Agenda 21, while recalling the need for genuine partnership between developed and developing countries to achieve the objectives established in that context. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the Convention on Biological Diversity. They welcomed the establishment of the Panel of Experts on Access and Benefit-Sharing and the continuation of the work to rationalize activities linked with the Convention. The Panel of Experts could help remedy a serious deficiency of most developing countries in terms of the capacity to formulate modalities with respect to access to genetic resources and the sharing of benefits.

12. The Group of 77 and China also recognized the importance of the adoption of a protocol on biosafety. Concerns regarding aspects relevant to health and development had stymied efforts on previous occasions, but the Group of 77 and China hoped that the parties could reach agreement after the resumed session of the extraordinary meeting in January 2000.

13. With regard to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the number of accessions and ratifications of the Kyoto Protocol was still small. Meanwhile, carbon dioxide emissions and greenhouse gases continued to have a profound impact on the world's climate systems, particularly on small island developing States,

which were directly threatened by the dangers of rises in sea levels. Needless to say those phenomena posed grave risks for sustainable development. The Group of 77 and China therefore strongly urged Member States which had not yet done so, in particular the parties envisaged in annex I, to accede to the Kyoto Protocol or to ratify it as soon as possible. They also stressed that the ratification of the Protocol should not be subject to new conditions imposed on developing countries with regard to the reduction of greenhouse gases.

14. On the subject of combatting desertification, the efforts made by the international community in that sphere were insufficient. The limited progress made so far in the implementation of the Convention had been accomplished largely with the already extremely inadequate resources of the affected countries themselves. Higher priority must therefore be accorded to the Convention, particularly through greater collaboration between the Convention secretariat and the Global Mechanism and increased financial, scientific and technical support for its implementation. In that context, the Group of 77 and China looked forward to the outcome of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

15. The review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States had pointed to the need for stronger international support for the efforts made by the States in question to promote sustainable development, given the vulnerability of their economies and the fragility of their ecosystems. The Group of 77 and China therefore called on the international community to assist those States in improving competitiveness and market access, encouraging the diversification of exports, and mobilizing new resources in order to implement the Barbados Programme of Action. In that regard, they stressed the continuing necessity for capacity-building and for the strengthening of institutions to deal with the cross-sectoral issues of sustainable development.

16. The Caribbean region and sea possessed a number of unique features which justified according them priority attention: exceptional biological diversity, highly fragile ecosystems and heavy reliance by most of the countries of the region on the coastal land and marine environment in order to achieve sustainable development. In addition, those countries were continuing to fall victim to natural disasters which undermined their development efforts. In the context of the special session of the General Assembly on the review of the Barbados Programme of Action, the Group of 77 and China had submitted a draft resolution on the question; they hoped that the text would be considered in greater depth during the Committee's deliberations.

17. **Ms. Rasi** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, aligned themselves with her statement.

18. The European Union attached great importance to the commitments made by all countries and major groups to the implementation of the principles of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21; it believed that the enhancement of public awareness was essential and engaged in continuous dialogue with civil society on environmental matters.

19. With regard to the Rio Conventions, the European Union believed that the conferences of the parties of the three instruments should consider the substantive issues within their remit. The General Assembly, for its part, should consider any operational decisions which it needed to take in order to enable the convention secretariats and the conferences of the parties to work effectively, and should also look into issues which were common to those instruments, such as those relating to coordination among them. It would therefore make sense to have a single resolution which covered all three conventions.

20. The negotiations to develop a biosafety protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity, setting out appropriate procedures, including an advance informed agreement procedure, had started in 1996. The European Union believed that those negotiations should be concluded at the resumption of the first extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in early 2000; a decision on an interim arrangement, pending the entry into force of the protocol, could be taken then as well.

21. The European Union supported the work carried out, at its fourth meeting, by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in many important fields, including the development of guiding principles for the prevention of impacts of alien species and the sustainable use of biological diversity. That body was continuing to provide valuable scientific input to the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

22. All member States of the European Union had signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1998 and had started to implement it. At Kyoto, the European Union had committed itself to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 8 per cent. The adoption of the Protocol had increased the level of interest in the Kyoto mechanisms.

23. The European Union supported capacity-building in developing countries in order for them to participate fully in the international debate related to climate issues. In that regard, the entire development cooperation portfolio of the European Union was subject to environmental impact assessment.

24. The Global Environment Facility played an important role by facilitating climate-friendly technologies in developing countries. It was important to involve all stakeholders in that area and to secure strong commitments by governments and relevant organizations. The establishment of a suitable policy framework was also extremely important for the adoption and use of alternative energy models and energy efficient technologies in developing countries.

25. The European Union noted that 1999 had been a year of change for the secretariats of the Convention to Combat Desertification, which now had a permanent status and had been moved to Bonn. It welcomed the entry into operation of the Global Mechanism.

26. The third session of the Conference of the Parties in Recife, Brazil, would consider the reports by African countries on their experiences in implementing the Convention, as well as the reports of donors on the assistance they had provided. The European Union hoped that that consideration would lead to useful lessons related to the implementation of the Convention at the local and national levels.

27. The Conference of the Parties would also consider the medium-term strategy of the secretariat and the first operational strategy of the global mechanism. As the Secretary-General had noted in his report (A/54/96), the Convention secretariat and the Global Mechanism should cooperate in order to avoid duplication and overlapping of their activities.

28. Since the focus of implementing the Convention was at the country level, it was essential to establish a network of national focal points, which should be designated by their governments. The implementation of that instrument required the integration of its goals and objectives into national planning processes. Desertification and drought were also cross-sectoral issues which required an integrated approach.

29. **Mr. Isakov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation attached importance to the implementation of the major United Nations conventions relating to the protection of the environment, as well as the recommendations of the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. He welcomed the fact that, on the whole, the scope of application of the Convention on Biological Diversity was being gradually expanded, as demonstrated by the decisions adopted at the different meetings mentioned in document A/54/428. The Convention must now go through a difficult stage in its development in order to achieve one of its main goals, namely, ensure that the benefits flowing from the exploitation of genetic resources were shared equitably. His delegation believed that the work that had been done in that regard was positive. In that regard, it shared the views of other countries and called for a global and balanced approach to the implementation of the decisions adopted by the Fourth Conference of the Parties. It also welcomed efforts aimed at including the Convention in the reform of United Nations activities in the sphere of environmental protection, especially arrangements that contributed to strengthening cooperation with other bodies. One of the priority tasks in coming months should be to finish work on the drafting of a protocol on biosafety.

30. The Russian Federation continued to honour its commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It had reduced the volume of greenhouse gases to a level well below that of 1990, and intended to fully meet its obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. The achievements of the goals under that Protocol would depend to a large extent on the results of efforts to establish optimal parameters concerning modalities for its implementation. Given the very tight deadlines that had been set for determining such parameters and taking fundamental decisions, the fifth Conference of the Parties, which had just opened in Bonn, was of great importance. In that regard, priority should continue to be given to the establishment of an international emission trading scheme for greenhouse gases, which must be based on the principle of voluntary participation and must recognize the right of every State to freely determine whether it wanted to accumulate the unused rights for use at a future date or whether to sell and/or use them to attract foreign investment.

31. The United Nations Convention on Desertification was the only international instrument relating to efforts to combat desertification and soil degradation worldwide. His delegation was satisfied with the results of the second session of the Conference of the Parties and wished to reaffirm its desire to accede to that universal instrument and to participate in the constructive work carried out in that context as a fully-fledged Party to the Convention. His delegation based its action in that regard on the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 53/191. It hoped that the additional regional implementation annex, which had been elaborated for countries of Central and Eastern Europe,

would be adopted. That would speed up the process of accession to the Convention for the Russian Federation and other interested countries of Central and Eastern Europe that were currently participating in the work of the Convention as observers. The work on the fifth annex was already yielding results. Thus far, six countries from the region were parties to the Convention.

32. In conformity with the provisions of the Convention, efforts were under way in his country, to prepare and implement at the regional level plans of action to combat drought, soil degradation and desertification. It was planned to eventually adopt a corresponding federation-wide programme.

33. **Mr. Özügerin** (Turkey) said that his Government had not acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change because it was included in the list of countries in Annexes I and II. He asked delegations for their help in having Turkey's name removed from the Annexes so that it could accede to the Convention.

34. Those Annexes included countries which had completed their industrialization process as well as the economies in transition. The inclusion of Turkey created responsibilities that it should not currently be asked to undertake. The Annexes as currently formulated did not reflect the levels of development and responsibility for emissions of all countries. That weakness made it difficult to implement the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. Although not a party to the Convention, his Government was aware of its responsibilities and fully shared the concern of the global community regarding climate change. The necessary legislative steps had been taken to reduce emission levels. Turkey continued to contribute to the Global Environment Facility as required by Annex II and had also made significant financial contributions to developing countries.

35. The matter of Turkey's exclusion from the Annexes of the Framework Convention on Climate Change had been taken up at the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties in Buenos Aires in 1998; discussions would resume shortly at the fifth session which was meeting in Bonn.

36. His delegation believed that commitments should be based on fairness and take duly into account the differentiated responsibilities and individual circumstances of the Parties concerned.

37. **Ms. Viotti** (Brazil) said her Government would soon host, in Recife, the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and reaffirmed her delegations commitment to international efforts to overcome the problem of desertification and drought, which affected approximately one billion people. She hoped that the meeting would call attention to the seriousness of the problem and to the need for adequate action.

38. The phenomenon of desertification affected approximately 11 per cent of Brazil, mainly in the north-eastern region. It caused loss of biodiversity, compromised the availability of water resources and provoked huge migratory flows which aggravated social problems in urban areas. Her Government was committed to implementing a national plan to combat desertification. It had started an awareness campaign on the causes and effects of desertification and had also fostered actions to promote international cooperation in that area. In 1998, Brazil had hosted the first Africa, Latin America and Caribbean forum on the implementation of the Convention during which a platform for interregional cooperation between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean had been adopted, which would serve as the framework for cooperation between Governments, academia and non-governmental organizations of both continents. The second forum would be held in Mali in 2000.

39. Given its wide-ranging consequences, desertification could not be considered a local or regional problem; the fight against desertification required coordinated efforts and international cooperation. Her delegation hoped that implementation of the Convention would reduce losses and prevent the damage caused by desertification in many regions of the world.

40. In order to fulfil those objectives, the Secretariat must receive the support of the States Parties to the Convention. It was also essential that developed countries take the necessary steps to transfer environmentally sound technologies and provide adequate financial support to the affected developing countries.

41. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway), with regard to the issue of climate change, said that it was essential to step up the momentum created by the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in the context of the Conference of the Parties which was meeting in Bonn. Efforts must be focused on the development of guidelines and rules for the implementation of the flexibility mechanisms. It was also important to adhere to the time-frame decided upon in Buenos Aires so that the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties could take decisions that would pave the way for ratification of the Protocol.

42. The experience of Activities Implemented Jointly (AIJ) had been largely positive, but capacity and competence-building must continue. The transition towards the Clean Development Mechanism was of vital importance for emission reductions and for the transfer of technology to developing countries. Cooperation between the developed and developing countries, based on their common but differentiated responsibilities, was essential for the Kyoto Protocol to succeed. The developed countries must also make every effort to reduce their emissions in accordance with the requirements of the Protocol.

43. The degradation of productive land, which was an issue of great concern, and food insecurity, were closely linked to the problem of poverty. The world community must follow up the Convention to Combat Desertification and States must meet the target of providing 0.7 per cent of GDP for official development assistance (ODA). The poorest countries, particularly in Africa, must continue to receive international assistance in order to combat desertification effectively. The greater part of the assistance provided by Norway was allocated to sub-Saharan Africa.

44. In order to improve the dialogue between policy makers and scientists, Norway had suggested that a scientific assessment mechanism be developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity. His delegation also believed that a mechanism to assess the status of implementation of the Convention at the national level was needed.

45. The recommendations from the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests to be held in 2000 should be of interest to the continuing work of the Convention. His delegation also attached great importance to the successful conclusion of negotiations on a Protocol on biosafety.

46. The General Assembly had recently held a special session to review the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. That session had shown that those countries were participating actively in the implementation of Agenda 21 in their own development. Norway had implemented a special plan of action for the small island developing States. In that context it had worked in close collaboration with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). The latter made practically no contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and sea-level rise yet they were likely to suffer the most from the effects of climate change. Their particular vulnerability underlined the urgency of dealing effectively with the problem of climate change.

47. **Mr. Abreha** (Ethiopia) recalled that the hazards posed by genetic engineering to health and to the environment, in particular to the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources, had prompted a call for a legally binding international protocol on biosafety. More than two years of negotiations had produced a draft text which sought to regulate the international movement of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), but the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity had been unable to adopt the text because six countries which were the main producers of genetically modified organisms had blocked the inclusion in the protocol of any provision which they perceived could hamper trade in GMOs and products derived from such organisms.

48. The release of GMOs into the environment was of particular concern. The developing countries which were the source of most genetic materials, were concerned that cross-pollination might take place between genetically engineered crops and non-genetically engineered varieties and that that might jeopardize biological resource conservation efforts, undermine food security and hinder the process of sustainable development.

49. For those reasons and as a country that had contributed, on behalf of the African countries, to the preparation of the negotiating text on the protocol, his delegation reaffirmed that the protocol should assess the hazards posed by all GMOs; that it should include a "precautionary principle" that would allow countries to reject GMOs and products derived therefrom if there was no scientific certainty as to their safety; that it should recognize the sovereign right of countries to refuse the import of GMOs and products derived therefrom and ensure the application of prior informed consent; that it should allow countries to take stricter measures to safeguard the environment and human health; that it should take into account the impact of GMOs on socio-economic activities and on human health; and that it should not be made subordinate to other international instruments which promoted free trade regardless of environmental and health concerns.

50. The developing countries were also concerned by certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights relating to trade in biological resources, because of the adverse impact on food security, the environment and human health. Equally important causes of concern were abuses of intellectual property rights by transnational corporations which were patenting biological resources of developing countries without recognizing community rights and without benefit sharing.

51. In 1998, the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity had recommended that member States

should adopt a draft model legislation on access to biological resources at national level; initiate a process of negotiation among African countries to adopt an African convention on biological diversity; and develop a common position to safeguard their sovereign rights and the vital interests of local communities.

52. The African countries were also threatened by drought and desertification, which phenomena, coupled with anthropogenic effects, exacerbated the menace of famine and helped increase the number of environmental refugees. In order to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, Ethiopia had designed a conservation strategy and in that context had formulated a national action programme to combat desertification; the success of that programme would depend on the financial and technical support provided by the international community.

53. It was to be hoped that the developed countries, international financial institutions and other organizations would make appropriate contributions to the Convention's Global Mechanism so as to enable affected countries to combat desertification, mitigate the effects of drought and bring about sustainable development.

54. **Ms. Bai Yongjie** (China) said that in the context of negotiations on climate change, it was important to respect the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. Developed countries, which were responsible for the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions, should be the first to take steps to reduce those emissions. The developing countries, whose per capita emissions were relatively low, should have as their primary task to develop their economy and to fight poverty, as stipulated in the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

55. Given the length of its coastline and lowlands, China was particularly affected by climate change and sea-level rise. The efforts it was making in that regard were being hindered by the state of development of its economy which was depriving it of the capacity needed to make serious commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, as a State Party to the Framework Convention, China had adopted a series of measures, in line with its sustainable development strategy, designed to slow population growth and to improve energy efficiency and structure.

56. China hoped that the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention would encourage the developed countries to assume their responsibilities and adopt a more open attitude towards the developing countries. It supported the efforts which were being made to prepare a clean development mechanism as such. Furthermore, with regard to exchanges of emission rights between developed countries, it believed that regulations should be prepared in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol.

57. The Convention to Combat Desertification had provided the international community with the necessary legal framework to combat the effects of desertification and drought which were threatening food security and hindering sustainable development. The developing countries must first of all make a larger contribution to the implementation of the Convention. China, for its part, had respected its commitments and adopted a series of measures designed to reduce the effects of natural disasters, including sandstorms.

58. Since the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the international community had worked towards protecting and utilizing biological diversity with uneven success. The developing countries were handicapped by their lack of resources, technology and capacity, a situation which it was essential to remedy. Her Government attached great importance to the negotiations on the protocol on biosafety and hoped that they would be completed as early as possible.

59. With regard to the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, a review five years later of the implementation of the outcome revealed a gap between the provisions and the execution of the Programme of Action. Accordingly, the international community must unite its efforts to put into effect the consensus achieved at the Conference, a process to which her Government undertook to contribute actively.

60. **Mr. Aho-Glele** (Benin) said that the eradication of poverty, especially in developing countries, was a vital task for the United Nations and one of the approaches adopted was combating desertification. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification highlighted the links between desertification and poverty and stressed the need to combat desertification, which was recognized as being of global concern and requiring worldwide and concerted solutions.

61. After commending the initiatives taken since the entry into force of the Convention, he stated that, like other conventions which had emanated from the Rio Summit, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on desertification prescribed differentiated obligations according to the categories to which the actors belonged, with responsibilities established at the level of developed countries, the Global Mechanism and developing countries affected by desertification.

62. Under the Convention, the developed countries were expected to contribute financial resources and other forms of assistance to developing countries affected by desertification. However, that assistance had not materialized, nor had the genuine partnership which would carry out the comprehensive measures envisaged. While some of the developed countries had made commendable efforts, others had yet to render assistance at the level envisaged in the international commitments.

63. The Global Mechanism, which had been established to facilitate the mobilization and channelling of financial resources to developing countries affected by desertification, had not begun to function until January 1999 and had not yet put in place all the necessary administrative personnel. It had therefore been unable to respond to developing countries' requests for assistance in drawing up country reports and programmes of action. Those in charge of the Global Mechanism should take steps to remedy that situation.

64. Benin belonged to the category of developing countries affected by desertification. Within the framework of the Convention, it had established a national committee to combat desertification and was to establish a national fund for that purpose. It had prepared its country report and adopted a preliminary draft national programme of action, thanks to assistance provided by UNDP, the United Nations Office for the Sudano-Sahelian Region and the Convention secretariat. In order to carry out its national programme of action, Benin was awaiting financial resources and genuine support from the Global Mechanism, and he trusted that the third Conference of the Parties (Recife, Brazil) would be the trigger for the initiation of national plans of action and thus the true starting point of strengthened action to combat desertification.

65. **Ms. Rohana** (Malaysia), said that her delegation had repeatedly advocated that environmental problems and sustainable development should be dealt with in a broader context with a view to tackling the root causes of poverty. Clearly, development and economic growth must accelerate to eradicate poverty; but it was also necessary to ensure that the emphasis was on environment-friendly sustainable development. The relationship between the environment and mankind had been discussed at Rio, where it had been recognized that States had common but differentiated responsibilities and that sustainable development required adequate scientific, technical and financial resources. Seven years later, on the eve of the new century, progress was mixed in terms both of commitments and achievements.

66. Regrettably, the United Nations system continued to face constraints already addressed in earlier sustainable development efforts, including lack of financial and human resources, lack of institutional capacity, and vague mandates and roles of agencies, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report (A/54/131). It was to be hoped that the effort to achieve a more coordinated approach to the follow-up to major United Nations conferences would create the necessary synergies and ensure a more efficient use of limited resources.

67. In the area of sustainable development, the Secretary-General rightly stated in his report (A/54/131) that education, public awareness and training needed to be the integral components of national strategies and plans. Her delegation awaited with interest the results of the survey undertaken by UNESCO in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP to determine whether adequate attention was being paid to education in national strategies and plans. Her Government was conducting various environmental education and training programmes for both students and teachers and was carrying out public awareness activities emphasizing environmental values, in cooperation with NGOs and the private sector. Consistent with its goal of sustainable and balanced development, as envisaged in Agenda 21, it had taken steps to ensure that environmental and social considerations were not neglected. It had adopted in its development planning a comprehensive approach which took into account the population's socio-economic needs and enhancement of the quality of life through improvements in productivity and the protection of the natural environment. A combination of legislative and innovative economic instruments had been adopted to encourage the development of environmentally sound technologies and environment-friendly products.

68. Malaysia was one of 12 countries which held between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of the world's biological diversity. Because of that rich natural heritage, it had taken various conservation measures as part of its national policy on biological diversity, initiated in 1988. That policy, which was based on the rationale that biological diversity was a cross-sectoral issue, would help to ensure that rapid national development was sustainable and environmentally sound and that Malaysia would be transformed into a world centre of excellence in conservation, research and utilization of biological diversity. His Government supported the idea of a biosafety protocol, which should be drafted in strong terms and should lay down the conditions for dealing with modified living organisms, account being taken of health factors, socio-economic considerations and biological diversity.

69. **Mr. Lewis** (Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the countries of the Alliance of Small Island States

(AOSIS) Members of the United Nations, said, with regard to biological diversity, that small islands were home to some of the most unique and diverse plant and animal species on the planet. Sadly, though, that biological diversity was also among the most threatened in the world. Population and development pressures, the introduction of foreign genetic resources, and the devastating effects of natural disasters ranked among the major causes. In small island States, severe natural disasters had a greater proportional impact on biodiversity than elsewhere because of the smaller population sizes and narrow habitat ranges of many local species.

70. The Convention on Biological Diversity was therefore of vital importance to small island developing States, which had been among the first States to ratify the Convention, along with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Island nations had prepared national biodiversity plans and strategies, as in the case of the Bahamas, whose Biodiversity Data Management Plan had been highlighted as a success by the United Nations in a recent report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/1999/6/Add.5). Such initiatives had benefited from the active engagement of island communities and the use of traditional knowledge in the conservation of ecosystems, and the United Nations system had also played a key role by assisting small islands in cataloguing and preserving their biodiversity, most especially in the forestry sector. However, although much had been done, the international community was far from making the kind of progress needed to ensure a healthy and stable living environment for future generations. Every year, small islands lost more of their beauty and diversity; hence the importance of the addendum on biodiversity resources in small island developing States (E/CN.17/1999/6/Add.5) to the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the programme of action for the sustainable development of small island developing States, which outlined priorities for future action. With respect to such priorities, the member countries of AOSIS joined the Secretary-General in his call for international support to small island developing States, especially for their efforts to protect native species and their habitats, to control alien invasive species, and to implement relevant international conventions.

71. Referring to the report of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (A/54/428, annex), he said that the members of AOSIS were pleased that the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice had adopted a number of recommendations in preparation for the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in May 2000, on, *inter alia*, the Global Taxonomy Initiative; conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial biodiversity; and the development of approaches and practices for the sustainable use of biological resources, including tourism. On the other hand, they wished to express their profound disappointment at the lack of progress to date in the negotiations for a protocol on biosafety, owing largely to the intransigence of a small group of countries. In accordance with article 19 of the Convention, there was an urgent need to consider modalities for advance informed agreement outlining appropriate procedures in the field of safe transfer, handling and use of any a living modified organism resulting from biotechnology that might have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Although there had been six meetings of the ad hoc working group established to negotiate the protocol, as well as an extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties, other aspects of the protocol remained unresolved, for example: handling, transport, packaging and identification; socio-economic considerations; and the relationship of the protocol with other international agreements. With the resumed session of the extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties scheduled for January 2000, island populations continued to have grave concerns about the potential adverse effects of food produced from genetically modified organisms on their health.

72. Some small islands had already disappeared beneath the waves; should current climate trends continue, such archipelagos as Maldives and Seychelles would see 70-80 per cent of their atolls sink into the ocean. Island States were the most exposed to the effects of climate change, which were a threat to their very survival. They had therefore repeatedly called for international action and, in particular, urged developed countries to cut back on their use of fossil fuels that heated the atmosphere. They were gravely concerned at the slow pace of ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, particularly since none of the 37 industrialized countries that were required to start cutting greenhouse gases in 2008 were among the ratifiers. AOSIS urged States Members of the United Nations that had not yet ratified the Protocol to do so promptly. Another process that States must focus on was the Fifth Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change; that important session currently taking place in Bonn would be an important milestone on the road to implementation of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. However, it was important to strike a balance between issues related to the Framework Convention and those under the Kyoto Protocol.

73. On the subject of desertification, he said that the members of AOSIS wished to highlight the importance of the Convention to combat drought and desertification; they recognized the magnitude of the problem, as well as the potential benefits of full participation in the Convention process. In protecting the planet's climate and preserving biological diversity, the international community must also address issues of soil degradation, erosion and salinization, which were all primary concerns to small island States. AOSIS would like to commend the Convention's Committee on Science and Technology for its work on benchmarks and indicators and for its consideration of an early warning system for land degradation, at the upcoming fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Recife, Brazil.

74. Referring to the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, he said that the Conference had been a historic moment, as had the recent special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. As a result, there was now a profound understanding of the ecological and economic challenges being faced by island nations and there was every prospect for successful implementation of the Programme of Action. In that context, AOSIS wished to express its appreciation for the initiatives taken by a number of countries, particularly for the support provided by Norway to the Small Island Developing States unit of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; by Norway and Italy to the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNET); by the United States to AOSIS, for the projects submitted for donor consideration by small island developing states; and by Singapore, for technical training activities in sectors linked to the Barbados Programme of Action. Although small island States must emphasize self-reliance, they needed assistance from the international community in order to face forces well beyond their control.

75. Referring to the draft resolution annexed to document A/C.2/54/4, he said that the members of AOSIS had been disappointed that the General Assembly had been unable to adopt a draft resolution calling for the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development; it was crucial to establish a regime for the protection of the Caribbean Sea and the sustainable development of its coastal and marine resources.

76. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia) said that owing to the magnitude and urgency of the needs of all countries in the economic, social and environmental fields, the measures taken by the United Nations system to speed up implementation of Agenda 21 had not yielded satisfactory results. Even though it was true that primary responsibility for the implementation of Agenda 21 lay with each individual country, it was also true that international cooperation was an important complementary factor in taking advantage of the real benefits of sustainable development. It was a matter of concern to his delegation that the United Nations system was experiencing difficulties in promoting more effective coordination in the field in question. In particular, the shortage of financial and human resources was having an adverse effect on the implementation of programmes and projects in areas of major importance. At the same time, the lack of coordination between the different bodies and agencies was resulting in the loss of scarce resources.

77. The second review of the implementation of Agenda 21, to be held in 2002, would have to bring more substantive results than those obtained during the first review, in 1997. In that connection, it was important that the preparatory process should begin as soon as possible and that the necessary documentation should be available to allow for an adequate analysis. The mobilization of new and additional resources and their effective assignment, as well as the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, were among the areas that should receive priority attention.

78. The Commission on Sustainable Development, as the intergovernmental body responsible for the follow-up to Agenda 21, played a central role in the promotion of sustainable development. At its eighth session, in 2000, it would have to consider topics that were currently the focus of attention of the international community.

79. Land resources, agriculture, finance, trade and investment were obviously questions of great importance in the elaboration of a world strategy for sustainable development. The discussion of those topics would offer an unprecedented opportunity to bring together governments, non-governmental organizations, representatives of civil society, United Nations agencies and other multilateral organizations. It would also allow countries to express their concerns and to propose possible solutions. It was therefore important that ministers of the environment, agriculture, trade and finance should participate actively in the dialogue during the high-level segment of the eighth session of the Commission.

80. The protocol on biosafety was of particular importance for Colombia, which was one of the five richest countries in terms of biological diversity. In its resolution 53/190, the General Assembly had recognized the importance of adopting an instrument on the question. Earlier in the year, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, meeting at Cartagena (Colombia), had

considered the question. After intense negotiations and substantive progress in the definition of the text of the protocol, the meeting had been suspended without having achieved its final objective; informal consultations had been held in Vienna the previous month, but no progress had been achieved.

81. The protocol had given rise to intense debates which had reaffirmed the need for the adoption of such an instrument. Governments had expressed their determination to advance the negotiations, but the political will had been insufficient to put aside the purely economic and commercial interests and give priority to the potential risks that living modified organisms represented for health and for the conservation of the planet's biological diversity. It was therefore important for all countries to reaffirm their political will and take the necessary measures without further delay to adopt the protocol when the session of the Conference of the Parties resumed in January 2000.

82. **Mr. Tiendrebeogo** (Burkina Faso) said that his country, which was one of those most severely affected by drought and desertification, had launched a national programme of action in order to implement the provisions of the Convention to Combat Desertification. To that end, the Government had adopted a comprehensive approach involving the various actors concerned and taking into account the local socio-economic context. A communication strategy had been established in that connection, in order to inform the population and arouse their awareness. Consultations had been held with the various partners at the national and local levels and particular attention had been paid to the role of women in that connection. There was, however, still much to be done and there should be a more sustained spirit of solidarity in the interests of all.

83. One of the questions of the greatest concern was that of the financing of the Convention. In that connection, it should be remembered that its aim was to help to combat poverty, since it concerned primarily the most vulnerable sectors of the population. It was important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that the instrument was aimed at the whole of humanity, in an endeavour to combat the adverse effects of individual and collective actions on the environment, as well as the burdensome consequences of the degradation of the ecosystem on communities. The financing of the functioning of the structures responsible for bringing the Convention to life should therefore, *inter alia*, contribute to efforts to prevent the exodus of populations to other, richer countries.

84. His delegation therefore solemnly appealed for adequate financing for the secretariat of the Convention and for stronger support for the functioning of the Global Mechanism.

85. It was also to be hoped that the General Assembly would decide to finance, through the regular budget of the United Nations, the conference-servicing costs of the fourth and fifth sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary organs.

86. **Ms. Hawkins** (Australia) noted that the special session of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action had provided an opportunity to focus the attention of the international community on problems faced by small island developing States with regard to the environment and development. Australia provided financial assistance and considerable support to those countries and had integrated the Barbados priorities into all aid activities under its national and regional strategies.

87. At the special session many small island countries had noted that their development partners had not provided the aid they had expected for the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. Other factors, however, were equally important for the sustainable development of those countries, in particular trade. All future international trade talks must have a balanced agenda which recognized the special circumstances of small island States and other developing countries. It was, indeed, essential to take into account the vulnerability of those countries in international decision-making processes. The South Pacific Forum, of which Australia was a member, had recently reaffirmed its intention of working in the United Nations to defer decisions on the graduation of the least developed countries until a rigorous and reliable vulnerability index had been developed.

88. As one of the world's most biologically diverse countries, Australia attached special importance to the action taken both at the international level and domestically to protect its flora and fauna. It was a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity and was actively implementing its commitments through a range of programmes and policies, including the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biodiversity and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999.

89. Australia was also working constructively on a number of important initiatives designed to protect Australian and global biodiversity. They included the development of guidelines to address alien invasive species and the establishment of the Global Taxonomy Initiative under the Convention. The proposed protocol on biosafety was a significant initiative, for it could strengthen the synergy

between environmental and trade policies, thereby ensuring that trade arrangements and environmental instruments were mutually supportive.

90. With regard to the issue of climate change, to which Australia attached considerable importance, she looked forward to productive negotiations at the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was taking place in Bonn. Her Government was committed to spending almost 1 billion Australian dollars on measures to address those issues. It would like to see as much progress as possible made at that session on the development of a bracketed negotiating text on the Kyoto flexibility mechanisms so that final decisions could be taken at the sixth session in 2000, as required under the Buenos Aires Plan of Action agreed at the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties. Delivering market-based solutions for the three mechanisms — international emissions trading, joint implementation and the clean development mechanism — would ensure that the Kyoto Protocol's environmental objectives were achieved at least economic cost.

91. **Ms. Forde** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the 14 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that were members of the United Nations, reaffirmed the commitment of her country to the principles of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The recent special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action had afforded an opportunity to consider the progress made and to identify those areas that required further action.

92. In the report it had submitted at that session the Commission on Sustainable Development had identified climate change, climate variability, sea- level rise, natural disasters, freshwater resources, coastal and marine resources, energy, tourism and trade as priority areas.

93. The small island developing States had endeavoured to assume responsibility for those areas of the Barbados Programme of Action that fell under their national and regional jurisdiction. Thanks to the Programme, Caribbean countries had now prepared national environmental strategies and action plans.

94. One of the fundamental principles on which the Programme of Action was based was that small island developing States accepted responsibility for their sustainable development. However, given the nature of the problems they confronted, the support of the international community was a sine qua non for successful implementation of the Programme.

95. The development partners of the Caribbean countries must mobilize greater resources in order to help finance the Programme. Many Caribbean States faced the double jeopardy of donor fatigue, even as they contended with the implications of premature graduation from concessional financing; that was threatening the very foundations on which the Programme of Action was based. It was important, in that context, that the partners of small island developing States should respect the spirit of the agreements made in Barbados in 1994 and fulfil their commitments under the Programme of Action.

96. In the intervening period, globalization and liberalization had become the most fundamental challenges confronting all nations. Their effects on the most vulnerable countries were far-reaching. The small island developing States recognized that they could not isolate themselves from the forces of globalization and they did not dispute that globalization offered them some opportunities; but they could not seize those opportunities without first making adjustments. Their developed partners must help them adjust to trade liberalization by reversing the trend in the decline of official development assistance.

97. At the forthcoming Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, CARICOM member countries would call for a more democratic WTO, for the benefits of free trade were to be enjoyed by all.

98. The vagaries of the international economic environment had dictated that Caribbean States, like the developing and developed world, should seek to diversify their economies to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by globalization. In the Caribbean region attention had been concentrated on the development of the services sector and some countries in the region had successfully carved out niches in the area of international financial services.

99. A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on geographically mobile activities and financial and other service activities, referring to what it described as "harmful tax practices", wrongly identified a number of Caribbean countries as "tax havens" and proposed a number of punitive measures that apart from being unjustified would be detrimental to those countries' growing dependence on the important financial services sector.

100. The report was based on the premise that any competition with OECD member countries was harmful and it sought to place all tax regimes in the same basket. Member countries of CARICOM had invested a great deal in the development of their financial services sector. Their

activities were legitimate, competitive and regulated; they were not dissimilar from those of developed countries that encouraged foreign direct investment.

101. The Caribbean countries intended to ensure that their financial service regimes were well regulated and they would continue to work towards setting the highest standards and maintaining careful supervision of those regimes. The CARICOM member States had formed the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force to combat money laundering. The action contemplated by OECD appeared to be unfair and, if applied, could have disastrous consequences on the region.

102. The countries of the region were concerned about the degradation of the Caribbean Sea and were seeking cooperation from the international community in their efforts to ensure the preservation and sustainable management of that natural resource which was vital to the sustainable development of CARICOM member States. That was one of the reasons the Group of 77 and China had submitted a draft resolution which sought to have the Caribbean sea recognized as a special area in the context of sustainable development. It was their contention that the uniqueness of the Caribbean Sea and its vulnerability merited an integrated and coordinated management approach.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.